

NSC BRIEFING ~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ 4 August 1954

PRE-ELECTION TENSION MOUNTS IN SYRIA

I. Summary: Tension on eve 20 August elections indicates politicians' inability establish stable government; enhances chance military intervention.

II. The Situation

- A. Political Confusion: Major old-line parties completely ineffectual; field thrown open to radicals, particularly Arab Socialist-Resurrectionist Party.
 - 1. ASR supported by army group.
 - 2. May collaborate with Communist call for "national front."
- B. Labor Unrest: General strike averted; judges' now out. If continue, elections may be postponed--since needed for election machinery.
- C. Campaign Violence: Armed clashes regularly.

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III. Expectations (in order probability):

- A. Very Weak Government: Old-line politicians and independents will set up weak, coalition, government. Radical elements alone will gain.
- B. Postponement Elections: If judges' strike not settled. Hard to predict exact form of resulting chaos.
- C. Military Intervention: No evidence of immediate action, but: record of army intervention in politics; Assistant Chief of Staff strongly hinted readiness to act; Hawrani, of whom Malki is follower, reportedly planning coup before elections.

IV. Importance of Elections--may determine:

- A. Whether Syria will have civilian or military government.
- B. Whether Syria sides with Iraq or Egyptian-Saudi axis. If latter, then Lebanon, Jordan forced into same axis, and Iraq effectively isolated. Iraq wants Arab support for Turk-Pakistani pact.

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